

ABC NIGHTLINE

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KOPPEL: The topic of Soviet espionage came up on Capitol Hill tonight in a Senate debate concerning a new Soviet embassy building here in Washington. The story now from ABC congressional correspondent Brit Hume.

HUME: The Soviets are building a new embassy on a site near the highest point in Washington, a site some suspect will make it ideal for the interception of U.S. intelligence that pours in here by radio every day. In the Senate tonight, Wyoming Republican Wallop, a member of the Intelligence Committee, moved to authorize the president to stop the Soviets from finishing the embassy until the U.S. is provided a comparable elevated site in Moscow. Majority Leader Baker moved to block the amendment, saying the White House had just told him it was strenuously opposed, and so was the State Department. Said a sarcastic Wallop, 'The State Department would do almost anything to avoid disrupting tea time.' And as time ran out on the vote, Wallop was ahead. Baker lobbied Republican members frantically to switch their votes. Nevada's Laxalt, the president's friend, did, and so did New Hampshire's Rudman. Baker gazed across at Wilson of California. 'I've never done this to you,' he could be heard saying, 'but I need your vote.' Wilson didn't switch, but Virginia's Warner and Tribble did, and the Wallop amendment went down 46 to 42. The leadership put out this little brushfire, but there could be more like it. The mood around here these days is anti-Soviet and pro-U.S. intelligence. Brit Hume for Nightline on Capitol Hill.